

A Better Table Transcript
Arielle Rebekah

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Hello and welcome to A Better Table, a coffee podcast where we explore social, economic, and environmental sustainability. I'm your host Umeko Motoyoshi. My pronouns are they, them. And joining me today is Arielle Rebekah, founder of Trans and Caffeinated. Trans and Caffeinated is a blog, an Instagram page, and a podcast dedicated to exploring trans and queer issues. Hi, Arielle. Thank you for joining me.

Arielle Rebekah:

Hey, thanks for having me.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Would you like to say hi and introduce yourself to our listeners?

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah, for sure. I'm Arielle Rebekah. I use they/them pronouns. I founded Trans and Caffeinated a little under two years ago. Started as a blog and has since expanded to a podcast with some shareable social media graphics. Really my goal is to uplift trans and queer community and also to educate cis folks about trans and queer issues.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

And you also got your start in coffee. Can you help us understand how this all came together?

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. I started working in coffee in February 2015. I had just graduated from an abusive Southern boarding school that was basically a front for a conversion program, where my therapist outed me as trans to my family and told them I was doing it for attention. The school spent two years denying me the right to transition. It was extremely traumatic. When I got out of there, I was super determined to find an environment where I would not have anything similar to that experience again.

Arielle Rebekah:

I knew I needed a job, and so I literally went to Google and I was like, "All right, trans friendly employers." Starbucks came up, because Starbucks had been in the news a lot for creating safe spaces for trans folks. I started there in 2015 before I started college. I started college in August 2015. During college, I was a women and gender studies minor, psychology major. My junior year I interned for a couple of different major LGBT organizations in New York City.

Arielle Rebekah:

One of them, I really hit off with my supervisor. She's actually my current supervisor at Trans Law Center. After that, she offered me a job which I worked at for a couple months as staff at GLAAD, which is an LGBT org in the city. But I wasn't getting benefits through them. I was getting benefits through Starbucks, so I had to leave, but was just kind of looking for a way to integrate my love for coffee with my passion for creating pockets of liberation and safe spaces and fostering education around queer and trans issues.

Arielle Rebekah:

I looked into part-time jobs that I could work while working in coffee. All of them were just too much for me to be doing. I lived in New York, so I would have to literally work two jobs if I did that. I was like, you know what? I'm going to do my own thing that's going to combine my love for coffee with my love for advocacy. And that led to Trans and Caffeinated.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Wow! I really didn't know so much of that backstory. That's such a journey that you've been on that's led you to where you are today. I'm going to start that question over. In the coffee world, there are so many queer and trans coffee workers. I'm wondering what that was like for you when you entered the coffee workforce and if you ended up connecting with more trans and queer people through coffee.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. I'm writing a post for Glitter Cat right now actually about that. To start off, no. In the very beginning, I was very isolated in Suburban New Jersey. There were a couple other queer folks at my store, but I was the only out trans person. The queer folks that I worked with were out to me, but they weren't super out and not super connected to the community. The first time I really realized how many queer and trans folks worked in coffee was when I started getting connected to coffee people on Instagram.

Arielle Rebekah:

That started happening when I started going to coffee festivals in New York, which was like probably almost three years into working in coffee. I started meeting people and connect with them on Instagram. I don't even remember how I found your page, but your page brought me to a bunch of other queer and trans folks. And then you launched the Rainbow Spoons. I was like, oh my god, so queer. It wasn't even queer and trans folks that I worked with.

Arielle Rebekah:

It was through working in coffee, through starting to follow more coffee pages at Instagram. I was like, oh my goodness, I'm not the only one out there.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

One time there was this person who works in coffee and they were reaching out to me a lot. They were talking to me a lot and saying, "I'm so glad that you're here. You're the only queer person that I know in coffee." I was like, oh no! There's so many.

Arielle Rebekah:

So many.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I linked them to all these different pages and I think yours was one of them, and then they never talked to me ever again.

Arielle Rebekah:

I guess you just expanded their world.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Yeah. Yeah. It was great. I mean, I was not hurt by it at all. I felt very happy.

Arielle Rebekah:

That's so funny.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Trans and Caffeinated exist on multiple platforms, multiple projects. What operations currently define Trans and Caffeinated?

Arielle Rebekah:

I don't know. Sometimes my Instagram is literally just a way to market blog posts and podcast episodes, but sometimes I'm like, oh, I can do other things with this. I'm not the most organized person, even though I think I have this façade of being super organized. Sometimes I'm just like I'm going to post educational resources that I'm feeling inclined to create right now. My Instagram is still developing. I don't know what I really want from it.

Arielle Rebekah:

I don't have a super set routine of how I utilize it, except that I like to post about new episodes on it. Really right now I'm most focused on the podcast. I pivoted to more of an emphasis on the podcast, because what I was realizing through writing blog posts is that I was sharing information I felt really good about sharing. I was sharing my story. I was giving information to people that needed it, providing education, but also it was through the lens of my own narrative.

Arielle Rebekah:

Even though I worked in advocacy, I've networked with a lot of people, I've heard a lot of people's stories, the reality is that my story as a white trans woman who is generally perceived as a woman when I walk on the street fuck passing, but it does give me... Fuck the pressure for trans people to pass or be perceived as their gender, but it does give me so much more safety in public spaces than other transfeminine folks have.

Arielle Rebekah:

That's kind of the narrative that we hear the most is pretty, white, skinny, trans women are "the most palatable" to a cis gender, heterosexual status quo. I became super aware that by just sharing my story, my narrative, I felt I was doing a disservice to large packets of my community. To me, launching the podcast and pivoting to putting more resources, more energy into the podcast versus my blog was my way of making sure that I was sharing more stories, more narratives than just my own.

Arielle Rebekah:

Within the past year or so, that's been my main focus through Trans and Caffeinated.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

That's really cool, Arielle. I really appreciate that about that. I've always really appreciated that you're someone who holds a lot of complexity. We all exist at different intersections of privilege and oppression. I feel like your voice has always been so clear in making those distinctions and in wanting to boost and support people who have less access to privilege and opportunities. I'm just really grateful for that work that you're doing.

Arielle Rebekah:

Thank you.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Thank you. I think there's a lot of responsibility that comes with having a platform. One thing I think about a lot is for me on my Instagram page and on my podcast, I want to utilize those platforms to boost other people. At the same time, I also feel this tension where it's like I still am the person with the platform, and I don't know always how to reconcile that. I'm wondering what are your thoughts on that? How do you approach that in your work?

Arielle Rebekah:

Sometimes it's really hard, especially what really frustrates me about Instagram is that photos of my own face are always going to be that perform the best on my own platform. Which feels really frustrating because sometimes I'm like, "Hey, here's all these other people's stories that I want to highlight." Instagram pushes them down in the algorithm because they're not the face of the person who owns the platform. At least with my own personal page, that's been my experience.

Arielle Rebekah:

Something that I've been doing a lot, A, is sharing posts in my stories because I feel like that is where other people's content is more visible, is more readily seen. But at the same time, it is still my platform. It's a hard one. That's something that I've really wrestled with as well is yeah, it is still my platform and I am the person with all of this power and privilege. How do I use that power and privilege in a way that's benefiting other people and not in a way that I am just trying to look like I'm using my platform power and privilege for good?

Arielle Rebekah:

How do I actually use that on social media platform, especially on Instagram that tends to be... I don't know. I feel like I try to not be shallow, but the platform itself is designed for I think people to be kind of shallow. How do I use a platform that's designed for these shallow photo sharing influencery types, you just get money for being pretty? How do I use that in a way that's actually helping people and is not performative?

Arielle Rebekah:

I think honestly the shorter answer is I'm still figuring it out every day. I spend a lot of time thinking about it, but don't have a crisp clear answer.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I feel like for me I... That's always a question that I'm considering. One thing that I try to do is behind the scenes of my platform, I try to be really proactive about offering people free social media advice and free

consultations and a lot of free help in building out their own platforms. I don't advertise necessarily like, oh yeah, if you want free social media help, then just hit me up, because I don't always have the time to do it.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I don't want to be in a position where someone's like, "Oh, can I get that free help," and I'm like no.

Arielle Rebekah:

We also set it up so people have an ability to take advantage of you, because it's not everybody who necessarily like... I don't know. Not everybody needs to grow their platform and not everybody is like white cis men I feel like I've heard enough of.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Oh yeah.

Arielle Rebekah:

Not to bash white cis men, but I mean, kind of bash white cis men.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

When I say people, I'm not talking about people who we already hear a lot from.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. I would feel like if you were like, oh, I offer free social media consultations, like the people that we already hear a lot from maybe the types of people that would then reach out and be like, "Yes, I would like that now please."

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Right, yeah. I think if I ever was in a position where I had the bandwidth to just say like, "Hey, this is something that I can offer," I would definitely specify that I can offer this for people who hold marginalized identities.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. I think that's a really great idea. I mean, I was super appreciative when you did that for me. You learned a lot through having your own platform and it was really helpful to talk to you.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. We did. Yeah.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah, we did that.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

We did that.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah! A couple of times. Because when I was doing my GoFundMe for my surgery, we also talked again.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Wow, yeah. Yeah, that's cool. I'm glad that we did that.

Arielle Rebekah:

Me too. It was super helpful.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

You're growing your own personal Instagram that's not the Trans and Caffeinated Instagram. You write a lot of really beautiful and thoughtful content there. Every time I look at your page, there's like another thousand followers. Your content is just so good. I'm wondering how does your personal Instagram page intersect with Trans and Caffeinated. And BT dubs, please feel free to plug your personal.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. My personal Instagram is @ariellergordon. That's A-R-I-E-L-L-E-R-G-O-R-D-O-N. Side note. I don't use the last name Gordon anymore, but Arielle Rebekah is taken on Instagram. Sad day. But that is really the only place in my social media handles that I use Gordon. Back to what I was talking about with the blog versus podcast stuff, I feel like that is sort of where I've made the distinction between where do I end and where does Trans and Caffeinated start.

Arielle Rebekah:

I use my personal platform very much for sharing my own story and my own perspective. It is these are my experiences. This is my narrative. This is what I go through on a day to day basis. This is what I'm currently going through. Recently I've been chronicling my own bottom surgery recovery, but that page doesn't claim to represent the entire trans community, and nor does Trans and Caffeinated. I am one person running this page.

Arielle Rebekah:

I cannot possibly capture an entire community no matter how much I want to, no matter how much I try. I can do my best, but that's realistically not possible. But on my personal Instagram page, I make it very clear, this is my story. This is only my narrative. If people want to read along, follow and hear what I'm going through, that's where I share that. With Trans and Caffeinated, I'm very focused on highlighting other people's stories, uplifting other trans folks, providing educational resources.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

How do you connect with the guests that are featured on Trans and Caffeinated?

Arielle Rebekah:

It's kind of a mix. Some of the people that have been on so far are friends of mine. I'm lucky to know a lot of queer and trans folks just through my personal... Being out for eight years, I've just met a lot of trans folks. The first few guests were people that I was personally friends with, and I felt like that was easiest because obviously I already have a rapport. I was trying to build something new.

Arielle Rebekah:

Now it's sort of a combination of either someone comes up in my feed and I am like, oh my god, this person is doing something really cool that I want to share. And then sometimes I have people reach out to me and they're like, "Hey, I would love to be on your podcast," which is starting to happen more and more now that I have more episodes out. I actually had someone reach out to me yesterday who asked me to be on my podcast, which I think is really cool because it means, I don't know, that they're enjoying my content.

Arielle Rebekah:

I ask myself periodically, what are the stories or types of stories that I haven't told yet? What are the perspectives that I haven't shared? What are the stories that are most often told and how do I tell the stories of... For instance, again, how do I interview someone who's, for instance, a skinny, pretty, passing white trans woman? How do I interview someone like that in a way that's responsible without telling the same story that gets told a million times?

Arielle Rebekah:

How do I share the story in a different light? I try to really think about what story I want to tell. When I'm approaching people for an interview, that's always the question that I ask before I think of who I want to have on the show if I'm cold pitching someone or reaching out to someone that I don't know super well. It's just, what stories am I trying to tell here?

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I'm thinking about that. That's really great. I'm processing it. Just reflecting on what you're saying about if you're out as a trans person for eight years, you end up knowing a lot of trans people. I'm an out and queer person and I know a lot of out and queer people. That is something that corporations want from me in this time where queerness is becoming so commodified. These corporations it's like want to commodify not just as individuals, but also commodify our networks, which are our communities.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I think for me ultimately I would rather be a queer person sharing my platform with other queer people than offering other queer people to a corporation that is run by straight people.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. When I feel like corporations... I mean, at least my experience with a vast majority of them is they would like to commodify our queerness and our transness without actually seeing us and without actually doing the work of supporting us. They're just like queerness is in and certain types of transness are in now. That's why when I talk about the pretty, white, skinny trans woman, that is something people just eat up these days especially when it's like platform by a corporation.

Arielle Rebekah:

This is nothing against pretty, white, skinny trans women, but the reality is that that is the story that corporations and cis straight white people are comfortable understanding. They have a framework for understanding what it means to be a pretty, white woman. That is the narrative that I feel like is most readily shared by corporations. I'm not interested in supporting Corporate America in continuing to

commodify queer and trans existence, especially while black trans women are being murdered and they're silent about it.

Arielle Rebekah:

We've lost over 30 trans people this year. Now it's Pride Month and we see all these queer, skinny, white, non-disabled people on the cover of all of these magazines. Those same magazines are silent when it comes to trans homicide and transphobic violence and all of the 150 plus bills that have been put out this year to target trans youth. There's certain people that they're like, "All right, this doesn't push that hard against the status quo, so I can get behind like, for instance, gay people being allowed to be married."

Arielle Rebekah:

They can get behind that because it doesn't push too hard against the status quo because marriage already exists and that was a concession they're willing to make. But when it pushes too hard against the status quo, such as like trans people being allowed to use locker rooms and bathrooms, and suddenly that's like too much.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Right. Yeah. Sorry, I got a text from my employee. They couldn't tell me that in person because I'm in the closet.

Arielle Rebekah:

We're both recording in the closet right now. It's just so ironic.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Yes.

Arielle Rebekah:

Talking about gay shit in the closet. That is okay.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I feel like that context for me is important to provide for people to really understand the value of queer and trans platforms for queer and trans people versus corporations run by straight cis people commodifying queerness for profit.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah, exactly.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

What you do is really great and I appreciate it so much. I really appreciate the new platform that is buy and for queer and trans people.

Arielle Rebekah:

I appreciate what you do.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Thank you. Thank you. There's a certain kind of magic I think that happens when queer and trans people connect on a platform that's like by and for queer and trans people. I feel there is just so much more room for authenticity and expression and creativity. It's way more fun. You know?

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. I love my allies. Allies are wonderful and we super absolutely need them. And even the best strongest ally really can't understand our experiences the same way that queer and trans people had because they haven't lived them. And that's just the reality of the situation. That's nothing against anything anyone's doing. But just the reality is we have a level of mutual understanding with other queer and trans folks by merit of being queer and/or trans that is through our own lived experiences.

Arielle Rebekah:

It can't be learned necessarily from the outside the same way that we live and experience it. I think for me that's what the magic is. It's just this level of understanding that is often just natural. I mean, for me with other trans folks and especially with other transfeminine folks, just an understanding and a mutual connection over our lived experiences, because I walk around in my skin every single day all day. There are so many things that I experience as a transfeminine person that other people just literally don't see.

Arielle Rebekah:

Other people don't see my filtered messages on Instagram and all of the creepy people saying creepy things to me all the time. And not that other people don't experience that, but chasers are a special kind of creep. Just random experiences that just come from being a transfeminine person that other transfeminine people understand without me having to explain it. I think that's where the magic comes for me.

Arielle Rebekah:

It's just this automatic shared understanding through our lived experiences that straight cis people no matter how hard they try won't necessarily be able to attain.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I think there are some really wonderful straight and cis allies who believe that part of their allyship must be having an extremely intimate understanding of queer and trans experiences that in some way is almost the same as having lived those experiences. They want to be able to relate. I think a really wonderful thing that an ally can do, this is my opinion, is acknowledge that there are so many things that are just not meant to be relatable and it's not possible for them to find those experiences relatable.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

By trying to match something from their experience, it in a way sort of invisibilizes the experience that they're trying to relate to.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah, absolutely.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

And within all the LGBTQIA community, there's also just so much diversity of experience. I am a queer person who is non-binary, and I have a completely different experience from you who you also are a queer person who is non-binary. But you're a transfeminine person and you've had this entirely different life experience than me. I don't relate to all of what you experienced.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I don't need to in order to love you and support you and want you to be able to share whatever you want to share about your experience and be respected and held with dignity and cherished.

Arielle Rebekah:

I think it comes down to for me people don't have to relate to me. They just have to hear me, see me, and believe what I say. There's so many part of our experiences like you're saying that people can't relate to, and that's okay. All I need from people is to be believed about what my experiences are.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

That's so real. I really appreciate that.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I imagine that what you do must make so many people feel really seen and validated because that is your approach. I just want to ask what kind of positive feedback do you tend to hear from people about your work?

Arielle Rebekah:

I mean, that's definitely like... I do hear that a lot that people feel seen and validated by what I do. Specifically with the podcast, being able to share so many individual stories, there are just so many people that would really put a quote from one of my episodes that somebody said in my inbox and be like, "Wow! This person said this and this really spoke me, or this really framed this experience in an important way that I haven't thought of before."

Arielle Rebekah:

That is why I do what I do. Even if people don't necessarily feel seen and validated by my own personal experience, I want to share as many stories as I possibly can in the hopes that everybody who listens feels seen and validated by at least one of the stories that I share. If not, multiple. People do message me and comment to my post like, "Thank you for sharing this. Wow! I never thought about it this way before." It's really powerful to... I don't know. Because we have all dealt with a lot of adversity.

Arielle Rebekah:

I share about the things that I've dealt with really publicly, but I'm under no illusion that I have gone through more or less than any other person. But I don't think that everybody shares about it as much as I do or the same way that I do. I acknowledge writing has always been my thing. Being able to verbalize

things is not something that comes as naturally to other people as it does to me, but my putting my experiences and my thoughts into words.

Arielle Rebekah:

One of the things people frequently say to me is like, "Thank you for verbalizing this because I'd never been able to put this into words before." That to me is the way that I see myself most making people feel seen and validated.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

You're a phenomenal writer.

Arielle Rebekah:

Thank you.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

That's such an important part of this. Because when someone can write as well as you can, you are able to put things into words that most people can't. Someone can experience something but may not have the words for it. It's not about like, oh, you can't describe your own experiences? It's like it is really difficult to describe the experiences that you share about on your page, and yet these are experiences that are shared by so many. We just don't have language around it in our culture yet.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Although culturally our vocabulary around gender and sexuality is developing and evolving, but there still is so much that we just don't have language for and don't have existing concepts or a framework that's already known. What you are able to do as someone who's so talented as a writer and so gifted with words is like you're able to name things for the first time. There are so many things that have not been named. Because you are such an excellent writer, you can do that. And that's amazing.

Arielle Rebekah:

Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I really appreciate you, and I really appreciate your writing. I also feel like there's so much value in the education that you provide for cis people, because there's no way a cis person would be able to just understand without having someone explain it. You are so good at explaining.

Arielle Rebekah:

Thank you.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I'm wondering what your interactions with cis people who follow your page and who engage with your content, I wonder what kind of interactions you tend to have with allies?

Arielle Rebekah:

I guess I want to address like, I mean, I get a lot of pushback too, and I think that's an important thing to note. I get a lot of people being like, "Oh, you're too uptight, or oh, your standards for cis people are too high, or oh, you're just angry about everything." The concept of especially trans women but trans people more broadly, we're perceived as angry when we advocate for people to just respect our existence or when we pushback against the status quo too firmly, people perceive us as angry.

Arielle Rebekah:

I think one type of cis person that I get in my inbox more regularly than I would like is just those people that just think I'm angry or complaining about things that don't matter because it doesn't matter to them. That's not the bulk of it. More than that, I do get the cis people who are allies in my inbox who are really grateful for the work that I do. That feels really validating, because that is... I mean, as much as I want to uplift queer and trans folks, we cannot do this alone.

Arielle Rebekah:

We need the support of allies who are willing to listen and hear our experience and believe us and call out their fellow cis straight friends when they're doing something that is taking away from safety for trans and non-binary folks. That's true of every social movement. Every social movement needs allies who are willing to hold people in the out group accountable for their behavior for taking away the safety that we're trying to cultivate as trans and queer folks.

Arielle Rebekah:

Those are the people that I enjoy hearing from the most, the people that are really like, "Hey, this really helped me. This really framed the thing in a way I hadn't thought of before," and the people who are really determined to then bring their fellow cis folks along. Because the reality of the situation is like a lot of cis folks will listen to me, and then also there are the cis folks who are more willing to listen to other cis folks than they are to me.

Arielle Rebekah:

For me, the cis folks that are engaging with my content and listening to me and believing me and believing trans people in general are sort of that... They bridge the gap between me and the cis folks who will only listen to other cis folks. I've thought about this a lot of like what is my place in this. Because for me, I'm a really radical person. I'm not trying to acquire new allies. That is not the way I operate. I'm not trying to appease cis folks. I'm not trying to play and be like, "Let's slowly gain progress." I'm like this is my ideal world. This is what I think we should be doing. These are best practices for creating safe spaces for trans people and people that are truly dedicated to allyship will begin to do these things. But the reality is, there are cis folks who I am just way too radical for.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

What is it that you tend to find the cis folks who are just not ready to hear your message? What are the things that you tend to find they give the most pushback over?

Arielle Rebekah:

Weirdly enough, the idea that we should normalize sharing pronouns.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Oh my god.

Arielle Rebekah:

I don't know why that is so contentious for people, but that is the most... There's nothing else that I hear more pushback about than that.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I wonder what it is about pronouns that make... I wonder what it is that makes people so upset.

Arielle Rebekah:

I truly do not understand. People have called me delusional for saying that we should normalize sharing pronouns.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

That's horrible.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah, it's...

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I feel like people think that it in some takes away from some part of their wholeness as a human being. If they have to respect someone's pronouns or share their own pronouns, it feels threatening to them in a way that I can't really understand.

Arielle Rebekah:

Well, for me it's also... I have struggled with this for a long time, how do I explain to cis folks just how bad it is to be misgendered all the time? How do you explain that phenomenon to cisgender people, because as much as I try to explain it is a literal gut punch every time especially for people that are consistently misgendered? For me, it's a lack of understanding of how severe that is, because we talk about microaggression, at least accidentally misgendered as a microaggression.

Arielle Rebekah:

But what people don't realize is that the aggression is only micro to the person doing it. For someone who is misgendered constantly, it is death by a thousand paper cuts. If you are misgendered a thousand times a day, that is not a small thing. If more cis people asking our pronouns helps to lessen that burden, why is it that big of a fucking deal? But it pushes back against the status quo and makes cis people actually like actively integrate something into the way they carry themselves around the world. And that for whatever reason is contentious.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Do you think that there are people who have a really strong reaction to the concept of normalizing asking for pronouns, sharing your own pronouns? Do you think there are some people who have that reaction because it makes them think about their own gender in a way that they're not comfortable with?

Arielle Rebekah:

I think probably yeah. I mean, something that I've been really acutely aware of is like transness is not a new phenomenon. There are not actually more trans people in gen Z than in the baby boomer generation. That is not real. What is real is the validation of gender. I'm fully believing that... At least this is my interpretation of it. Gen Z is the first generation with a full living group of queer and trans elders who were able to set examples of what is possible, what is allowed.

Arielle Rebekah:

Because our queer and trans elders, like the majority of the generation above us, was wiped out by AIDS. There was no one there to give boomers the right to explore their gender. I think a lot of... I hate the narrative that the people that are most homophobic are actually gay themselves, because I don't think that's true.

Arielle Rebekah:

But I think there is something to be said for this resentment that a lot of boomers, like in older folks, might feel around never having been allowed to explore their sexuality and gender, never having been given permission to explore themselves the way that millennials and especially gen Z have been able to do. Which is why for me I tend to see the most pushback about that among boomers and gen Xers.

Arielle Rebekah:

I think there is definitely something to be said for it making them think about their own gender in a way that they've never wanted to allow themselves to do. If they did it, their same age peers might be not the most open-minded about it because they've never been able to do that before. I think people are scared.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I think that makes a lot of sense. I agree with you also. To me it feels gross when that phenomenon is weaponized as like, oh, you're only homophobic because you're gay. That definitely feels like gross to me. I often lately think about really similar things to what you're discussing. That there are so many people who are in older generations who just never were given the opportunity or cultural permission by anyone, not even a subculture.

Arielle Rebekah:

Or the language even.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Yeah. I remember times in my life before I came out as non-binary, before I realized that about myself that I am a non-binary person, I remember when I thought about my own gender, it would feel like I was falling into a black hole. It felt so scary to me because there was a part of me understood that I wasn't what other people thought I was. There's a lot of fear that for me came along with even just considering that without this construct of gender built around me, I'm not as protected.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I wonder if there are people who are really uncomfortable with the pronoun thing because they feel threatened in their cisness. And that there are also people who feel uncomfortable about it because they feel threatened in their gender queerness.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. It's like for them normalizing it or sharing their pronouns with their peers is like, all right, if I'm sharing my pronouns with my peers, then what are they going to start to think about me? Are they going to start to notice things? Are they going to start to think that I'm queer? Is it going to be uncomfortable for me? What are people going to think about me if I start pushing in my own life to normalize pronoun sharing? I think it makes them feel exposed.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Right. That's why we just got to keep normalizing it.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

You know? I was talking to a friend. He's an older person who identifies as cis. He was saying that he has a Zoom call with a bunch of friends who are in his age group who also identify as a cis men, and he wants to start adding his pronouns in his Zoom groups. He was saying that he wants to do that because he wants to signal to other people in that friend group that if they are questioning their gender, then he's like a safe person to talk to. I just felt that was such a beautiful and sweet thing.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. Especially in Zoom and stuff, that's literally what it does for cis people to have their pronouns in their email signatures and in their Instagram bios and their Zoom handles is it does that. It signals to other people like, "Hey, I'm a person that understands how important this is, and I'm a safe person to talk to about this." Obviously that's not the whole thing. Those people then have to actually be safe people to talk to about it. But it's a way for them to signal to other people like, "I understand. I see you. I hear you, and I'm willing to open this discussion with you."

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Arielle, what is your favorite part of doing what you do?

Arielle Rebekah:

Meeting people. Hands down especially meeting trans people and especially getting to meet new people to interview, getting to hear someone's story. When I was talking in the beginning and you were like, "Oh, I didn't know any of what you just said," that moment for me as an interviewer is my favorite moment of like maybe this is someone I've known for a while. Maybe this is someone I just met and I've been looking on their Instagram.

Arielle Rebekah:

But hearing someone share a part of their story that I've never heard before is just such a beautiful moment because they're sharing this intimate part of themselves, yeah, with my audience. But in that

moment that we're recording, they're sharing this intimate part of themselves with me. It's such a blessing. I love that.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I love that too. I love that for you, I mean. I love it for me also, but I just feel like you're such a lovely person. It just really reflects so much of who you are as a person that you derive that really special kind of joy from just getting to understand people better. What's your least favorite part? What's the most challenging deal to deal with? I'm sure there are many challenges, but we don't have to go super into detail if you don't want to.

Arielle Rebekah:

It's not just the pushback from cis folks in general. It is pushback from cis folks who are like, "I love and care about you, but I can't get behind this thing you're saying. I love and care about you, but you're just so angry these days that I don't want to talk to you anymore." It's like the neoliberal phenomenon of like I am okay if I can see you, but not if I can hear you. As long as trans folks are quiet and just exist within the cis heterosexual status quo without making too much noise, neoliberals are fine with that.

Arielle Rebekah:

But as soon as you start making a lot of noise, there's a lot of pushback. The people in my life who said they supported me when I first came out and said they love me and said they would stand with me as I came into my own as a trans person, and now that I'm now super outspoken and saying like, "Hey, cis folks need to do better. Hey, this part of the status quo actually creates a lot of fear and danger for trans folks," now that's too much. Now I'm just an angry trans person.

Arielle Rebekah:

There's been a lot of relationships that I've valued that have been very, very hard to continue in a way that feels healthier, positive for me while knowing that those people aren't willing to do what it takes to make trans people bare minimum safe. That's been really hard. There's relationships that I've just lost because I'm not willing to compromise on the safety for myself, for members of my community.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

There's only so much energy that you have. There's only so much time you have. There's only so much labor you can put into trying to help and explain things. And then at a certain point, it's like if someone just doesn't want to accept it, then your time, your energy, your dignity is so valuable.

Arielle Rebekah:

Yeah. Yeah.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

What are you most excited about when you think about the future of Trans and Caffeinated? And all of the... Sorry, go ahead. Go ahead.

Arielle Rebekah:

No. I mean, I'd love to figure out ways to scale it. I love to figure out a way to employ other trans people. And I do. I have an audio editor who I pay and I do some website work, but I love to figure out a way to

not necessarily monetize it for myself, but be able to bring in money to give money to trans people who need it. I don't want Trans and Caffeinated to forever be synonymous with Arielle Rebekah. I want it to be its own entity eventually. I've been thinking a lot about how I want to do that.

Arielle Rebekah:

I mean, obviously I love just continuing to meet new people and that's something that I'm always going to be excited for. Ideally I would love to scale it to the point where it's bigger than me. It is not Arielle Rebekah is Trans and Caffeinated. It's Trans and Caffeinated. This platform by and for trans people that I happen to start.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I love this.

Arielle Rebekah:

That's my abstract vision.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

I love this vision. I support this vision.

Arielle Rebekah:

Thanks.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

How can our listeners connect with you and also support your vision?

Arielle Rebekah:

Trans and Caffeinated Podcast is pretty much wherever you would want to get podcast, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Play, all the places. I host on Anchor, so it's on Anchor. And then if you go to anchor.fm/transandcaffeinated, you'll find the links to everywhere you can listen to it. [Transandcaffeinated.com](https://transandcaffeinated.com) is my website, although apparently you're allowed to make websites that are .gay now, so I try to... Yeah, right?

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Oh my god!

Arielle Rebekah:

Isn't that amazing?

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Yes!

Arielle Rebekah:

Part of me wants to be transandcaffeinated.gay.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Yes!

Arielle Rebekah:

Isn't that amazing? I know my friend texted me last week about it.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Oh my gosh!

Arielle Rebekah:

Did I just make your day?

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Yes! Yes, you did.

Arielle Rebekah:

I might be undergoing a URL shift pretty soon, but hopefully I'll set it up so that you can still type in .com and it'll get you there, but it'll be really be transandcaffeinated.gay. I'm also on Instagram @transandcaffeinated. Yeah, right? Isn't that so cool?

Umeko Motoyoshi:

You have a Patreon, right?

Arielle Rebekah:

Oh, yeah. Why do I always forget to share that? Yeah, I'm on Patreon, patreon.com/transandcaffeinated. You can pledge and get some merch that is exclusive to patrons. You also get early access to every episode exclusively on Patreon, as well as shout outs in an episode of my show.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

Nice! Arielle, thank you so much for spending this time with me today and sharing about your work. Thank you so much for who you are in the world.

Arielle Rebekah:

Thank you for spending this time with me and who you are in the world.

Umeko Motoyoshi:

You're welcome.